

have had 'a glorious rule' was Amihere Kpanyili. Atuabo became the capital. His small community grew as a result of immigrations of people like Kekam from Takyiman, Nkrofol from Akwamu, and Beyin from Asebu. In due course, some of these settlers crossed the Ankobra and expanded the territory of present-day Eastern Nzima.

Up to the mid-nineteenth century Nzima was one state. However, the nationalist resistance, dating back to the days of George Maclean (1835), was led by the great ruler Kaku Akaa, and after his final deportation by the British to Cape Coast the state was divided into two: the British supported puppet became ruler of Western Nzima, with paramount seat at Beyin.

Before Denkyira and later Asante extended their sphere of influence in the south-western direction, Awowin controlled a vast territory in the Western Region and well into present-day Ivory Coast. But early in the seventeenth century, Denkyira reduced eastern Awowin into a tributary territory. However, following Denkyira's own decline at the beginning of the eighteenth century, Awowin regained its independence, as did many other vassal states of the former great empire. Awowin remained strong and prosperous up to the closing years of the nineteenth century, when it was split in two by the French and British imperial authorities.

Although Sehwi comprised three traditional states, Anhwiaso, Behwai and Wiawso, the people are kinsmen. They have in common one tutelary deity, *Sabore*, and observe a common annual festival, the *Atielolie* or *Etwo*. The first of the states to emerge as a kingdom was Anhwiaso; it owed its expansion to the influx of immigrants from other Akan kingdoms. Its first principal town, Wenkyi, would seem to confirm the tradition that the original immigrants settled there from the Bono kingdom, much the same as the capital of the other state, Bekwai, would seem to support the oral tradition that her first settlers immigrated from Bekwai in Asante.

The traditions maintain that Wiawso was the latest to develop as a kingdom, and is said to have been founded by immigrants from Wasa Amemfi, led by Obumankoma.

For many years up to the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Sehwi were vassals of Denkyira. Following the final defeat of Denkyira by Asante, Sehwi, like many other subject-states of Denkyira, asserted their independence, but they were soon after annexed by Asante. Being absorbed into the Asante empire, they played an important role in the Asante military incursions into Awowin and Nzima from the second decade of the eighteenth century.

Sehwi, like the other inland Akan states, owed its growth to the abundant wealth of gold and ivory which the territory supplied. So much gold was obtained in the area that one of its principal towns was named *Bousan*, after a 'river which spits out gold'. In the nineteenth century, the wild rubber industry was another important resource which led to Sehwi's economic strength.

#### Notes

1. Although now part of Akyem, Abuakwa, the inhabitants of a quarter in the town are predominantly of Akwamu descent.
2. Some historians accept the view that Okomfo Anokye hailed from Awukugua in Akuapem, then an Akwamu vassal state. Others maintain that he was a native of Akrokyere in Adanse, and that he served at the court of the King of Denkyira. To reward him for his invaluable service to Asante, Okomfo Anokye was made a chief of Asante Agona.
3. The Akan word 'soro' applied to this belief does not necessarily mean 'heaven'; it is the generic word for 'up'. In the same way, when some sections of the Asante used the word 'soro' in their claim that their ancestors descended from the skies, all that was probably meant was either the 'north' or the 'highlands'.
4. In the nineteenth century, the British caused the *Odwira* to be replaced by *Akwasidae Kesié*, in a bid to stop the human sacrifices which used to be offered to the god *Odwira* at the annual festival.

## Chapter 4

## The Non-Akan

In addition to the Akan, the indigenous population of Ghana includes three other major groups of people, the Ga-Adangbe, the Ewe and the Mole-Dagbani. To the east of the Akan are the Ga-Adangbe in the Greater Accra Region; the Ewe are in the southern part of the Volta Region. In the Northern and Upper Regions are other groups, the majority of whom are collectively known as the Mole-Dagbani, the most important sub-divisions being the Mamprugu, Mossi, Dagomba and Gonja. One significant institution which differentiates all these groups of people from the Akan is that, like most other peoples, they normally follow the agnate or patrilineal line of inheritance.

**THE MOLE-DAGBANI**

With the exception of the Gonja state which, according to well-established tradition of the people, was founded as a kingdom by Mande invaders, all the other groups of the Mole-Dagbani trace their origin to one common ancestor. It is believed that the land occupied today by the Mamprusi, Mossi and Dagomba was inhabited by an earlier people in small separate communities. These were probably the Vagala, Sisala and others. From about the twelfth century A.D., invading warriors with greater military strength and enjoying more advanced political and social institutions moved from somewhere in the east, possibly Zamfara in Hausaland, or the Lake Chad territory, entered northern Ghana, and imposed their authority on the indigenous inhabitants. They were led to their new home by a light-skinned great warrior, Tohajie, who, because of his fair complexion and prowess, was also known as the Red Hunter. On arrival, the warriors first settled at Pusiga, near Bawku, subjugated the aboriginal inhabitants, and consolidated their hold on the territory.

**The Mamprusi and Mossi**

Tohajie's grandson, Bawa (or Gbewa), set up a settlement which developed into the Mamprugu or the Mamprusi kingdom. Having the advantage of superior military, political and cultural institutions, Bawa's people were able to impose their rule over the aboriginal peoples of the land. But a new develop-

ment grew out of the fusion of the two peoples, which has been maintained among most of the Mole-Dagbani people to this day. The new rulers became political leaders, and the aborigines the spiritual heads, known as *Tengdana*, and the custodians of the land to which they maintained a religious cult.

Mamprusi became the centre of the dispersion of the Mole-Dagbani people. From here, mainly as a result of succession disputes, descendants of Bawa moved in different directions to found new kingdoms. At different intervals three groups moved northwards, leaving many of their kinsmen behind, and founded the Mossi kingdoms of Wagadugu, Yatenga and Fada-n-Gurma. Another group, the Dagomba, moved southwards to their present lands in the Northern Region of the country, and built up the Dagbon kingdom.

The oral traditions concerning Mamprusi (Mamprugu) as the mother state of the Mossi and the Dagomba has some fairly certain confirmation, not only in the fact that these two groups in different versions of their local traditions trace their ancestry from Bawa, but also to this day, the traditional rulers of the Mossi and the Dagomba look up to Mamprusi as the eldest state, and in time of crisis refer succession disputes to the *Na* or ruler of the Mamprusi to be resolved. Like their offshoot, the Mossi, Mamprusi became a very prosperous and powerful kingdom. Under King Kugu, Mamprusi influence extended as far north as the new homes of the Mossi lands. The Mamprusi also became very wealthy through acting as a link in the rich trade between Asante and the different parts of the Western Sudan.

**The Dagomba**

To the south of Mamprusi is Dagbon, founded by one of Bawa's sons, Sitibo. Sitibo's son and successor, Nyagse, a great warrior who reigned about 1476 to 1492, annexed several territories including Daboya, an important salt-producing centre, and Buipe, a key commercial town. Nyagse is said to have adopted the policy of killing off the ruling dynasty of conquered kingdoms, and of installing members of his own family in place of the local royal lineage. His grandson, Zangina, continued the conquest started by his predecessors and annexed Bona in present-day Ivory Coast.

Dagbon became great largely because of trade and conquest, until the reign of Darizogo, the eleventh known ruler of the kingdom, when her ascendancy was halted by the rising power of the neighbouring state of Gonja. Even so, the Dagomba held their own for a time, particularly under their king, Zangina, and his successor Asigeli. However, in the reign of the Asantehene Opoku Ware I (1720-50), Dagbon was reduced to being a tributary state of the Asante. Asante continued to exact tribute in the form of slaves from the Dagomba until 1874, when, by the Treaty of Fomena which concluded the *Sagrenti* War, the Asante agreed to give up slavery.

Archaeological finds discovered at the site of the ancient capital of Dagbon give evidence of the high degree of civilisation which the kingdom must have

enjoyed at the peak of her power. The finds indicate, among other things, that not only did the people put up buildings some five storeys high, but they were also able to cut out of the rock an underground water storage cistern which could contain about a million litres of water.

### The Gonja

The traditions of the ruling class of the Gonja maintain that when the invading Mande warriors arrived in their present territory in the Northern Ghana, they found settlements of the Asante. These aborigines were subdued, but, as could be expected, their language exercised some influence on that of the new arrivals. For example, the suffix *wura*, an Akan word meaning 'master' or 'lord', was added to names of towns to indicate the ruler of the place, e.g. Ndwura Jakpa. If we accept the tradition, this would seem to be an explanation for the fact that some Asante claim that they descended from 'soro' or 'the heavens' which, as we explained in the footnote on page 31, could mean 'north'.

As we noted earlier, unlike the other two Mole-Dagbani people (Mamprusi and Dagomba who were kinsmen of the Mossi), Gonja was founded by Mande warriors, believed to have been led by Jakpa. Like most other founders of states, Ndwura Jakpa has been credited with many legendary achievements. The following account, however, seems to be well-established as historically true. Having established and expanded the kingdom, he was able to subdue the Dagomba ruler, Darizigo, in about 1620, forcing the Dagomba to move their capital eastwards to a new place, Yendi.

To ensure unity in the provinces of his expanding empire, Jakpa is said to have instituted a special law (later to be adopted by Osei Tutu of Asante) which forbade, under pain of death, a conquered people or state to make any reference to their past independent status and history. Again for the purpose of ensuring unity, Jakpa followed the example of the Dagomba rulers before him, and installed members of his own family as rulers of tributary states. At his death, Jakpa controlled a vast kingdom, stretching for about three hundred and twenty kilometres from Bole in the west to Basari in the present-day Republic of Togo.

Not long ago, an important document written in Arabic was found by scholars, which tells the history of Salaga, the capital of the Gonja state, and the conquest of the Gonja ruler, Sumaila Ndwura Jakpa Lanta, who reigned in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. This document, written in the nineteenth century and apparently based on oral traditions, gives useful information about the history of the Gonja people. At the peak of its power, Salaga was very powerful and prosperous. It was a centre for north-south and west-east trade. Its trading links with Hausaland were at one time very strong. The articles exchanged included kola nuts, hides, Islamic literature, etc. As a centre of brisk commerce, Salaga attracted people from as far as Bornu,

Yoruba and Nupe lands in present-day Nigeria, from Wagadugu in the Mossi country, and from the Akan states of modern Ghana.

Jakpa did so much for his kingdom that he is still remembered by his people as their most celebrated ruler. To this day, the spot where he is said to have died is honoured as a sacred place. When a Gonja wants to mention the name of the place he must, by custom, sit down and take off his cap or head-gear. Moreover, the name of the place has become their greatest oath. Jakpa's tomb is given the same reverence. According to the custom of the Gonja, if a person commits a crime and takes refuge in the tomb, he has to be set free.

### Government of the Mole-Dagbani States

The Mole-Dagbani had many institutions in common, but the political institutions of the Mamprusi, Dagomba and Gonja differed in one important aspect from those of the Mossi states. In the three southern Mole-Dagbani states, as we noted earlier, there were dual authorities. The political rulers were the descendants of the eastern invading band of warriors led by Tohajie the Red Hunter, or the Mande immigrants respectively. They formed a sort of aristocracy who imposed their political power on the indigenous peoples whom they met. The aborigines became known as *Tengdana*, 'owners of the land', and were in charge of the earth cult and remained custodians of the land. They exercised great influence on state affairs. In Gonja, for example, the *Tengdana* installed all the sub-kings.

### Islam

The early history of the people of northern Ghana was greatly influenced by the introduction of Islam, for wherever it was firmly established, this religion tended to become more or less a state religion, and its teachings and practices permeated all economic, social and political institutions, as well as the national policies of the state.

The cardinal doctrine embodied in the Holy Book of Koran, believed to contain the revelations the founder of the religion received from God when he retired to a cave near Mecca, at the foot of Mount Hira for prayer and meditation, is the belief in one supreme God, *al-Allah*, meaning 'He that is greater than all else'. The Koran also teaches the doctrine of the equality of all men. Furthermore, Islam enjoins the faithful followers, generally known as Muslims (or Moslems), to faithfully observe five important duties, prescribed by the *Sharia*, a body of Islamic law. First, all Muslims must pray five times a day at fixed hours. Second, during the ninth month of the Ramadan, the month during which, before founding the Islamic religion, Muhammad retired to the cave at Hira, the Muslim must observe a total fast from dawn till sunset, neither eating nor drinking even water, and abstaining from sexual relations during the daytime. Thirdly, a Muslim who can, must visit Mecca, the seat of the religion, at least once in his lifetime, to pray at the *Kaaba*, the famous

black stone in the Holy City, believed to have been erected by the Jewish patriarch Abraham, for the worshipping of one true God, and which the Arabs had turned into a centre of idolatry several centuries before Muhammad consecrated it as a holy shrine. Fourthly, Muslims must give alms to the poor as a duty. Fifthly, are a number of acts forbidden to the faithful Muslims: idolatry, adultery, usury, the use of intoxicants, and the killing of infants such as twins who were tabooed in many ancient societies.

An important injunction imposed upon all Muslims is the duty of spreading Islam even, if needs be, by war or *jihad*. As long distant traders, the early Muslims combined trading enterprise with the spread of their religion. Apart from the duty of spreading the religion wherever they went, the Muslim merchants saw many advantages in establishing the religion among the people with whom they traded. In the Islamic society which they helped to establish, they enjoyed security for the smooth running of their business and were assured of a fair deal. This was so because throughout the Muslim world, human relations and trade were strictly controlled by the teachings of the Koran and the regulations of the *Sharia*. Finding themselves in such an advantageous atmosphere, the Muslim merchants steadily gained economic power, and through their position as religious leaders and teachers won for themselves great respect and influence in the courts of the kings and other rulers in the lands where they settled. Invariably, their presence influenced the economic, social, political, cultural and religious life of the people. This was what happened when Islam became established in present-day northern Ghana.

Islam was permanently introduced into northern Ghana through two main sources. The first, in point of time, were Muslim merchants from the adjacent Western Sudan. The second were immigrants from Hausaland in the southern part of the Western Sudan.

The exact time when Islam was introduced in what is today the Upper and Northern Regions of Ghana, is not known for certain. Some scholars maintain that this occurred not later than the fifteenth century. It is probable that long before the fifteenth century, some peoples to the north of Ghana had trading links with the Western Sudan. It was not unlikely that some of these traders, coming under the influence of the Muslim way of life, were converted. It was also likely that, in time, some Sudanese Muslim merchants were attracted by the wealth which could be obtained direct at the markets in Mamprugu and other territories now in northern Ghana as well as Bono and Asante.

As happened in medieval times when Muslim merchants from northern Africa introduced Islam in the Western Sudan, Muslim merchants from these Sudanese territories, notably the Mossi and Wangara, established Islamic communities in northern Ghana and engaged themselves in the spread of the religion among the people. This was made easier by the fact that, as we noted on pages 32 to 33, the Mossi in particular were kinsmen of the Mamprusi.

The spread of the 'new' religion among the Dagomba and the Gonja is

believed to have started in about the late seventeenth century or early eighteenth century in the reign of the celebrated ruler of Dagbon, Muhammad Zangina. As a prince, Zangina came under the influence of Islam during his sojourn in Hausaland, and is said to have been the first Dagomba ruler to embrace Islam. Through him Hausa malams, weavers, well-diggers and other artisans moved to his kingdom, led by Malam Mahama or Muhammad al-Kashnawi. The immigrants settled at Kamshagu, about ten kilometres east of Yendi, where Zangina created the leader as Kamshagu-Na.

With the conversion of and patronage offered by rulers, Islam steadily spread widely in northern Ghana, and Islamic institutions and practices merged with or replaced native ones. Among these, to this day, are the existence of imams and other Islamic state offices, the use of the Muslim calendar and observance of Islamic festivals, widespread adoption of Muslim fashions of naming, system of marriage and laws concerning inheritance, etc.

Through trading and other forms of intercourse, the Islamic religion and influence penetrated south into Asante, Bonoland, and other Akan states from the eighteenth century onwards. Although conversion to and the impact on the southern states of the new religion was not on as large a scale as it was in the north, Muslim leaders came to exercise remarkable influence on the people. Some of these malams served as clerics and advisers in the royal courts, even though in nearly all cases the rulers held on to their ancestral forms of worship.

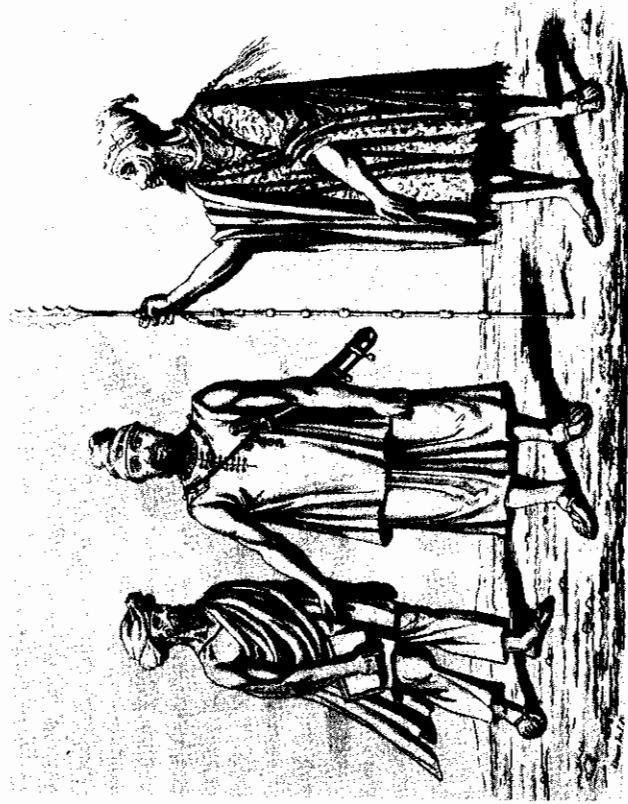


Fig 9 Dagomba and Salaga Muslims in their traditional dress in early days

Both the rulers and the ordinary people came to believe in the presumed supernatural powers of Muslim prayers and of objects like talismen prepared by the *malams* for protection, so it was believed, against evil happenings or for different forms of success. This belief has persisted among some people of Ghana to this day.

Apart from these beliefs, the introduction of Islam and the settlement of Muslim communities in the north and elsewhere in modern Ghana has had tremendous impact on Ghanaian society. Because of their skill in trading enterprise, the early Muslim merchants contributed greatly to the economy of the places where they transacted trade and commerce and where they made permanent settlements. Whereas before their arrival trade tended to be limited to local markets, and was therefore limited in character and volume, the presence of Muslim merchants opened up wider horizons for trade and prosperity. It encouraged many indigenous people to travel to faraway lands who returned not only with new ideas, but also with some skilled men, such as architects and learned scholars who helped to foster Islamic education among the people. Many people learned to read and write in Arabic.

It is worth mentioning, too, that the trading activities of the Muslim merchants helped the growth of smaller settlements into important market townships. Thus Yendi and Salaga, for example, became focal points in trade with the south, north and Hausaland in Nigeria.

In more recent times, the Islamic religion penetrated down south to the coast of Ghana where it has had a sizeable following, though because of the earlier establishment of Christianity in these coastal places, Islam has not gained as much ground as it has done in northern Ghana.

More recently still, in 1921, a new form of the Islamic religion, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Movement, was introduced into the country by missionaries from Pakistan. With its headquarters at Saltpond in the Central Region, the Ahmadiyya Movement is also holding its own in the religious life of the country. Unlike the original Islam which started in the north and which promoted Koranic private schools only, the Ahmadiyya Movement has founded schools and colleges which cater not only for Arabic education, but also have curriculum covering many subjects in the western education system. The Movement has also joined hands with the Christian churches in providing social services including hospitals and clinics.

### THE GA AND ADANGBE

The oral tradition that the Ga and Adangbe are kinsmen, and indeed originally one people, seems to be supported by several facts. Not only are the two groups neighbours geographically, but they also speak closely related dialects, Adangbe being considered by linguists to be the older of the two dialects.<sup>1</sup> These facts aside, three important practices seem to confirm their affinity, namely the

important role of priests in state affairs, the practice of circumcision, and the well-defined order of child-naming which is not found among any other groups of people of Ghana.

Like a section of the Fante and the Ewe, the oral traditions of the Ga-Adangbe trace their original home somewhere in the 'east', which some historians believe could have been in present-day Nigeria; the Ga traditions name Benin, and the Adangbe recall Tetetu or Someh, an island in River Ogun adjoining the Republic of Benin, as their original home. According to these traditions, the Adangbe and a section of the Ga emigrated to the country by land. Other groups of the Ga, on the other hand, were said to have arrived by sea. The legends relating to their arrival by sea in large numbers are said to be the origin of the present name *Nkrang* (driver ants) by which a Fante hunter referred to them. From this word derived the English name, Accra. It is significant that the native word Ga is itself a shortened form of *Gagz* which also means the driver ants.

The date of the emergence of Ga as a kingdom is not certain, but it must have been before the Portuguese arrived in the country. Originally the Ga lived in scattered communities some kilometres inland. In due course, they developed Ayawaso as their principal town. The inland people cultivated the land and met their kinsmen on the coast at *Kpehe* (meaning a meeting place or market), now a suburb of Accra, where they exchanged their crops for fish.

As time wore on, the prospect of benefitting from European trade attracted many Ga living inland to settle on the coast. The Ga Mashi, Nungua and Tema were first to move to the coast, probably early in the seventeenth century. They were followed by the La and Osu who originally lived in the Adangbe territory of Ladoku and Osudoku respectively. As a result of a dispute, a section of the La led by Mankralo Numo Okrang Nmashi moved out and made their own settlement at Teshie.

Each Ga settlement comprised seven quarters called *Akutsei*, and the quarters were subdivided into *We*. While the family heads of the quarters in all other Ga towns were not chiefs in the true sense of the word, each of the seven quarters in the Ga Mashi had its own chief. In due course, probably during the reign of Okai Koi, ruler of Abola, one of the Ga Mashi quarters, these separate groups came under one ruler. This enforced unification of the principalities became a source of disaffection and disunity among the Ga, a situation which was largely responsible for the fact that the Ga did not develop into as strong a kingdom as the powerful Akan states.

The oral traditions confirm that initially the Ga, like the Adangbe, did not have kingship as existed in the other parts of the country; they were ruled by priests. To this day, the *Wulomei* (or priests) occupy a special place in the Ga-Adangbe political and social set-up. Through constant contact with the Akan, the Ga-Adangbe adopted some of the Akan political, social and military institutions. These included not only the Akan system of kingship, but also

entertainments like *Adowa*, military songs, funeral dirges and Akan words like *anihiao* (laziness), *ohiafo* (poor person), *kunim* (victory), *pesemankonya* (selfishness), etc.

The first two rulers of the Ga as one people who, according to the oral traditions, laid the foundations of the Ga principalities were Mankpon Okai and his successor, Ayi Kushi. Ayi Kushi was followed as ruler by a queen, Dedoi Akai, who hailed from the neighbouring state of Obutu. To end her despotic rule, one oral tradition states that her people buried her alive in a deep pit she had ordered them to dig with their fingers!

After Dedoi Akai, her son Okai Koi became the next ruler. Perhaps the greatest of the early Ga kings, Okai Koi is recorded to have enjoyed a long reign of fifty years, from about 1610 to 1660. Having gained ascendancy over all the petty states of the Ga, Okai Koi succeeded in warding off threats of annexation of his land by his neighbours, the Akwamu. He next embarked upon offensive wars in a bid to extend his growing kingdom. Owing, however, to mutual mistrust and the separatist spirit and treachery of some sections of the Ga, Okai Koi's forces eventually suffered a decisive defeat at the hands of the Akwamu, at the Battle of Nyantrabi in 1660. Following this defeat, the king committed suicide. Before he ended his life, Okai Koi is said to have prophesied that if he fell from the stool he sat on with the front part of his body which he had painted white showing, this would indicate that despite the odds, Ga would remain a great kingdom. On the other hand, if his back, painted black, showed upwards, it would be an omen indicating disaster and the final collapse of the kingdom. He fell with his back painted black showing.

In spite of the omen predicted by his father, Okai Koi's son and successor, Ashangmo, mustered courage and continued the war against the Akwamu right up to 1680, when increased disloyalty, division and treachery sapped the morale of his forces, and he was defeated by the enemy. For the next fifty years, from 1680 to 1730, Galand became a vassal state of the Akwamu, thus apparently fulfilling the prophecy of Okai Koi. After his defeat in 1680, Ashangmo and a large number of followers fled the land, crossing the Volta, and obtained a settlement near Aneho in the present Republic of Togo. Personal names such as Ayi and Ayitey are to this day common in the Ga settlement in Togo. When Akwamu's power began to decline in the first half of the eighteenth century, many of the Ga in exile returned to their ancestral home.

### THE EWE

The Ewe, like the Fante, comprised many petty kingdoms in the pre-colonial days; many of these are now outside modern Ghana in the Republics of Togo and Benin. Within Ghana itself there were many sub-divisions, such as the Anglo, Bey and Gen on the coast, and the people of Peki, Ho, Kpando, Tovi,

and Ave in the interior. Their kinsmen, in present-day Republic of Benin, were the Fon and Aja. The oral traditions of these people maintain that they all originally lived somewhere east of the River Niger. For reasons which are not remembered in the traditions, these people emigrated westwards, halting at different places, including the then Yoruba territory of Ketu, now in the Republic of Benin. In due course, Notsie, in present-day northern Togo and Tado, became centres from where sections of the Ewe people dispersed in different directions to form separate kingdoms in both present Togo and Ghana.

It is not unlikely that when a section of the Ewe emigrated to modern Ghana, they met groups of earlier settlers whom they overpowered and absorbed into their own communities. It is now accepted that the Ewe emigration was gradual, and there appeared to have been three moves at different times. One section moved from Notsie northwards at first, and turned westwards. Some of these settled at Palime in the present Togo; others continued their march and made their permanent homes in Hohoe and Kpando districts. The second wave of immigrants settled in the Ho area. The third were the people of Peki, a name which confirms that they were the last to arrive.

These northern settlers came to be referred to as the core of the Ewe, to differentiate them from their kinsmen, the Anglo, who emigrated later and settled on the coast, east of the southern reaches of the Volta. The Anglo moved in two parties. One party led by Amega Wenyia halted at Atiteti on the northern bank of present-day Keta Lagoon. Later a section of this group crossed the lagoon and settled on the sand-spit between the lagoon and the sea. Here Amega's two sons, Akaga and Awanyado, founded a town which they named Keta, meaning the 'head of the sand'. The second group of the Anglo emigrants was led by Sri. This section first settled in the open land lying between the lagoon and the estuary of the Volta River. Having maintained a separate existence for some time, Sri and his people re-joined their kinsmen and built a new united state with a capital at Angloga.

The people of Anglo began to flourish and devoted their attention to fishing and crop farming. By the middle of the eighteenth century their kingdom had become strongly established. It had grown in size and had become prosperous through trade both with her kinsmen the Ewe inland, and with the Danes and other European merchants on the coast. However, in the second half of the century, the Anglo were drawn into conflict both with the people of Little Poppo in the east, and the people of Adaa on the left bank of the Volta. The conflicts arose mainly out of quarrels over farming lands and fishing rights. In 1750, these quarrels resulted in a war with the people of Adaa. Assisted by the Akuapem and Akyem, the Adaa inflicted a defeat on the Anglo, who were forced to leave their capital, Angloga. Later, having gathered their scattered forces and led by their general, Anyamakpa, the Anglo avenged their first defeat when they scored a series of victories over and expelled the Adaa from

their territory. By 1761 they had restored peace. Another war started in 1776, and again the Anglo emerged victorious over the Aadaa.

In 1783, as a result of the Anglo attacking a Danish trader, nicknamed by the people 'Sagbadre' (a swallow), the Anglo came into armed conflict with the Danes. Having courted and secured the support of the traditional enemies of the Anglo, including the Ga, Aadaa, Akuapem and Akyem, the Danes inflicted a crushing defeat on the Anglo, who came to terms with the white men by signing a treaty with the Danes in 1784. According to the terms of this treaty, the Anglo agreed to allow the Danes to build a fort at Keta; within a year fort Prinzenstein had been built. They also agreed to open all trade routes for their northern neighbours to trade with the white men on the coast. The Anglo came under the influence of the Danes till 1850, when the Danish government sold their possessions in the country to the British. Angololand thus became part of southern Ghana when the territory was proclaimed a Crown Colony in 1874. The northern section of the Ewe in present-day Volta Region was annexed by Germany as part of Togo, following the Berlin Conference of 1884-5, but in 1921 went to the British under the mandate system of the League of Nations. For a time, before Ghana became independent, the territory north of Angololand together with the eastern portion of present Northern and Upper Regions was known as Trans-Volta Togoland.

#### Notes

1. This theory would seem to support the Ga tradition which claims that many groups of the Ga, such as the La and Osu, once lived in Adangbe.

## Chapter 5

# Social and Political Organisations

There is a wealth of truth in the words of the eighteenth century Irish-born British statesman and philosopher, Edmund Burke, who said: 'People will not look forward to posterity who never looked backwards to their ancestors.' These words sum up the importance for a people to cherish and preserve their history and cultural heritage, including their political and social institutions. During centuries of association with and domination of the people by the white men, the western influences changed much of the cultural practices and values of our fathers, but did not destroy these institutions totally. Indeed, since the country regained independence, conscious, successful efforts have been made both by the Government and by individuals to revive much of what was despoiled by the influence of the white men. What are some of these native institutions?

### SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

Central to Ghana's social institutions is the 'family', but it is important to first define what the Ghanaian concept of the 'family' means. While in the non-Ghanaian sense of the word the family includes only the parents and the children of the home, in Ghanaian society it embraces a whole lineage. Among the Akan, the family includes all the maternal relatives; with the other groups, the family takes in all the members of the paternal lineage. Yet it is also true that in both the Akan and the non-Akan societies, both the paternal and the maternal relatives are, in a loose sense, also accepted as blood relations, enjoying and accepting some mutual rights and duties. Thus, inasmuch as blood relations in Ghana embrace many more persons than in the western and other civilizations, it is usual to refer to members of the blood relations as the 'extended family'.

#### Marriage

Arising from European and Christian influences, more and more marriages in Ghanaian society today have become very much Westernised. Many people, notably those who have received western formal education, conclude their



Fig 10 Wood carving of mother and child

marriages under what is called the Marriage Ordinance, passed in the colonial days. This type of marriage is attested by a marriage certificate either at the Registrar-General's Department, the courts or at the Christian churches which have been granted license as places where the pastor could conduct 'legal' marriages.

Side by side with the western type of marriage ceremonies, there are indigenous forms referred to as customary marriages, which from the point of view of the people are just as valid as those concluded at the Registrar-General's Department or in a Christian church. Indeed, it is the common practice that before a couple conclude a marriage according to the Ordinance, they must first go through the customary marriage formalities. The details of observances or formalities leading to the customary marriage may vary in different parts of the country, but there are important processes which are common to all sections of the country. Among these are the following.

One customary practice in Ghanaian society which differs very much from the western and other forms of marriage is the important role which the parents and other members of the extended family play up to the time the marriage is concluded. Having expressed their intention to become married, the couple remain in the background. It is the prerogative of the father or other person acting on his behalf to ask formally for the hand of a bride for the son; the bride's formal consent is expressed through her father or a relation

of his. The first stage of the marriage ceremony is the offering of what, for lack of a more appropriate English term, is called the 'knocking fee', which takes the form of drinks given to the bride's father. The next stage is the engagement ceremony at which representatives of the two extended families concerned assemble, and prescribe 'fees' in the form of money, drinks, a trunk filled with cloths, and other valuables including, in some places, live animals such as cow or sheep, are presented to the bride's parents by the boy's father. As soon as the engagement ceremony is over, the couple become, for all practical purposes man and woman, and their mutual marital rights and obligations begin. Representatives of the two extended families meet on an appointed day to finalise the marriage. The man pays the dowry, and gives further presents, including special money paid to the bride's mother for bringing up her daughter so well from her babyhood. A token sum of money is also handed to the brothers of the bride before they will symbolically allow their sister to go over to another man. In the evening of the same day, some elderly women from the girl's family, carrying a lamp, take the new bride over to the husband's house, and if it is the girl's first marriage, these ladies go to the husband's house again at dawn the next morning. In the early days, it was customary for the young man to hurl up to their view a piece of white cloth, to symbolise that the wife was a virgin before she came over to him.

From the moment the marriage is concluded, a new relationship is established among members of the two extended families brought together by the marriage of their respective two children. On the occasion of all important events, including funerals, the affected family must formally notify the other family, who then have to play an important part at these events. According to Ghanaian custom, a wife retains her own rights and bears her own maiden name throughout her marriage. She can acquire and dispose of her property in her own right. On the other hand, the husband pays for his wife all prescribed taxes and levies, and is by custom held liable for payment of every undischarged debt of his wife if she becomes insolvent.

#### Childbirth and the Age of Adolescence

As in most other societies, the people of Ghana regard a fruitful marriage as a blessing, and a marriage which is not blessed with children after a reasonable period of time is looked upon as a curse, and almost invariably results in separation or divorce. It is natural, therefore, that the arrival of a new baby from the union is marked with great jubilation and a special ceremony.

During the first seven days after its birth, the baby is confined to a room. On the eighth day, the two families of the couple assemble early in the morning, usually at the paternal family house, and the baby is brought out to see daylight for the first time. The ceremony among most Akan is brief on this occasion; it is generally marked merely by the pouring of libation to thank God and to invoke the spirit of the ancestors to protect the new baby. With



other groups of Ghanaians, such as the Ga, however, the naming ceremony on the eighth day is an elaborate and festive one. It is the occasion of 'outdoooring' the baby. The baby is given a name, and a grand festivity lasting all day generally follows, during which relatives and other friends present gifts in cash, clothes and jewels to welcome the new baby. The Akan, on the other hand, allow some time to elapse after the baby's birth before they perform the naming ceremony. The belief is that the giving of an ancestral name to the baby is so sacrosanct that they must allow time to ensure that the child would survive. This was understandable in the early days when, because of the lack of adequate ante- and post-natal medical care, the rate of baby mortality was very high.

The naming of a baby, both among the Akan and other peoples of Ghana, is attended by symbolic ceremonies. Among most Ghanaian peoples, including the Akan, Ga and Ewe, the baby gets its own first name corresponding to the day of the week on which it was born; all persons born on the same weekday receive the same common name. At the naming ceremony, which is performed by an elderly member of the paternal family, the child is then given a family name which, more often than not, would be the name of the baby's grandparent or another important member of its father's lineage. As a mark of respect or gratitude, the baby's father could request that the child be named after an in-law or another person outside the two external families. In the

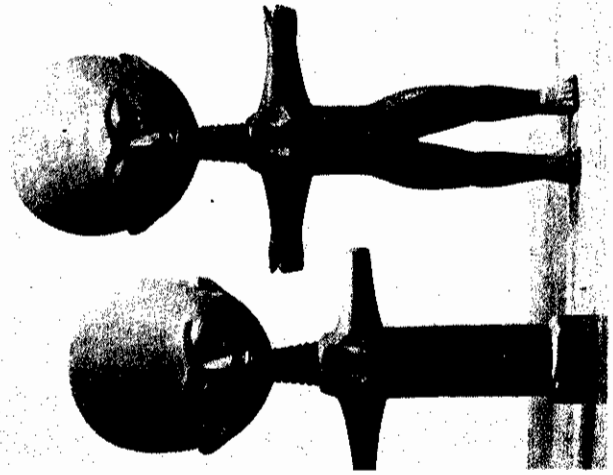


Fig 11 Wooden dolls carried by some pregnant Akan women in early days to ensure the health and beauty of the expected baby

native society, the child bears his own names throughout life and not his father's surname.

The actual naming ceremony itself is brief, but solemn. The elderly person performing the ceremony puts a drop of water on the baby's tongue, followed by another drop of alcoholic drink on its tongue. On each occasion he admonishes the child to be truthful throughout life in the following words: 'If you say water, then it must be water; if you say alcohol, then it must be alcohol'. The remaining portion of the drinks are then shared out to every person present and to others who would come later to the ceremony.

Girls enter adulthood when they reach the age of puberty. On attaining the age of puberty in traditional society, a girl passes through some rites before she is regarded as having attained womanhood. From then on, a suitor could ask for her hand, as we noted above, through his father. However, in early days girls in their infancy could be betrothed. This was generally done to cement the ties of friendship existing between two families. Despite the obvious dangers of committing infants to future marriages, many betrothals of this kind ended in successful marriages. On reaching manhood, a boy's father procured for him a shotgun. This customary practice symbolised that the youth had attained the age of bearing arms, and was liable to be called up in time of war. It was from then on, too, that the youth was deemed to have come of age and become liable to pay taxes and other local and state levies.

#### Death, Funerals and Inheritance

As on the occasion of marriage, the funeral of the deceased in Ghanaian society is the responsibility of both the immediate and distant members of his extended maternal and paternal families. Each party plays a role prescribed by custom to give the deceased person a befitting funeral. As soon as a person dies, all the leading members of both the maternal and paternal families are informed of the sad news. In the case of a spouse, the message is accompanied with a token sum of money sent to the surviving partner. On the death of an unmarried person, the extended families bear the funeral expenses. If the deceased left behind a spouse, the surviving partner, or the children if they are of age, bear the responsibility of providing the coffin and shroud for the burial. When a person under age dies, the father shoulders the cost of the coffin and shroud. However, in keeping with the social practice which knits the Ghanaian extended families closer than in most other parts of the world, all adult members of the extended families contribute towards the funeral expenses. Indeed, in small or village communities, all adult residents pay their shares to defray the expenses.

Rulers and queen mothers are given state funerals. Generally the news of their death is not announced, in many cases, for several weeks. This delay allows the entire state to prepare for a fitting funeral for the royal deceased person.

Ghanaians have always believed in life hereafter. After the corpse of the deceased has been put in the coffin ready for burial, it is the practice to put some cloth, money and jewels in the coffin for the deceased's use in the next world. The head of the family then pours libation, and the coffin is sealed and carried away for burial. About the third day after the burial, the extended family meet and fix a date for the final obsequies. It is at this final ceremony that, in most parts of Ghana, a member of the family is appointed to 'inherit' or 'succeed' the deceased. In the case of rulers and queen mothers, a successor is generally installed before the final obsequies are held. According to the belief of the people, the spirit (or ghost) of the deceased hovers in the home where he lived in life for forty days after his death. A special 'parting' ceremony is held on the fortieth day. On the first or second anniversary of the death, another special ceremony is held. In the case of important adults it is on this occasion that his trunks are publicly 'opened' and his valuables are shared among members of the extended family, leaving a substantial part to the person appointed to succeed him.

There is, however, in Ghanaian indigenous society a system of making a will and last testament; it is made orally in the presence of leading members of the extended family. The beneficiaries express their indebtedness to the testator by offering to him token presents of drinks and live animals such as sheep, of which all persons present serving as witnesses partake. This form of will and



Fig 12 Pouring libation at a shrine

last testament, though unwritten, has the same validity in native customary law as the modern written wills. Indeed, this is held to be more sacrosanct than the Western wills. The belief among the people is that any person who interferes with or changes the last will and testament of the deceased will suffer very regrettable consequences, including death caused by the testator's ghost.

Among Ghanaians, a man's links with his extended family are not severed with his death. The deceased is regularly remembered by his extended families at all social gatherings, especially at the annual festivals when, among other rites in non-Christian society in the early days, food was placed on his grave. An adult Ghanaian would seldom take drinks without first pouring some drops on the ground, calling upon the departed dear ones to partake of the drinks. Furthermore, the memory of the dead member of the extended family is perpetuated through the treasured custom of naming children after them. The child is expected to become the second-self of the ancestor after whom he is given his own personal surname.

### Social Classes

Ghanaian native society is made up of three social classes. The king and the queen mother constitute the first estate, followed by heads of the lineages known in Akan as *abusua*. Also accepted by customary law as 'elders', these heads of the extended families serve as the council of state; they counsel the ruler in all important matters of state. Belonging to the third estate are the commoners, comprising all other free-born persons in the society who, for lack of an appropriate designation, are referred to as the 'youth' in contradistinction to the 'elders' who make up the second estate. In this usage, the term 'youth' includes all age groups, the young as well as the old, who do not belong to the 'aristocratic' classes of the first two estates.

Outside the pale of the three estates described above, in early days, were other individuals, the servants and slaves. In Ghana as elsewhere, society recognised several states by which a man became servile to a master. One of these was pawning, by which a ward served a money-lender as a security till he was redeemed on payment of the loan and the interest on it. The pawn retained some of his personal rights. For example, on stated days, he could work for profit or for his parents or guardian. But the commonest servile status was that of slaves in the true sense of the word. These people were reduced to the state of servitude either through capture in war or through sale, or were hardened criminals condemned to death but whose fate was commuted to the state of slavery. The children of slaves were treated as 'property' of their parents' master, much the same the offspring of a domestic animal belonging to the master.

At first, slaves hardly enjoyed any rights, and were often victims for human sacrifices. It was, however, not uncommon for a slave endowed with outstanding mental qualities to rise to an important position at the royal court or

in an individual household. It was also not uncommon for fortunate slaves to win the hand of members of the royal family or to marry into the family of his master. Moreover, it was a common practice for kings and other free-born individuals to marry their own female slaves. These elevated slaves then gained respectable positions in society.

There was also the accepted practice in early Ghanaian society, as in other societies, by which a king or an important personality acquired and maintained a number of wards or domestic servants, who freely placed themselves under his care and patronage. Another common practice was that of a vassal who rendered services to his master periodically in return for lease of land for farming or adoption into a fishing enterprise.

### Religion

Throughout history, all peoples have cultivated religious cults of one form or another. Indeed, religion has always been an important aspect of all civilizations. Its basic characteristics are a certain set of doctrine including belief in a superior being, the offering of prayers and sometimes sacrifices in acknowledgement of their powers and protection, and the observance of certain moral codes.

Prior to the introduction of Islam and Christianity in Ghana, as elsewhere in West Africa, the people grew up with the inborn belief in one supreme being, thought to reside in the heavens above, the omnipotent and provident God whom they acknowledged as the creator and father of all, and to whom man owed his first religious allegiance. The languages of the people abound in proverbial sayings portraying these attributes of the supreme being, but the people also held in reverence other deities inferior to the supreme God. Some writers, such as Karl Marx, have put forward the theory that the cult to deities or religion throughout history originated in very early primitive society when men, lacking the scientific knowledge to understand amazing phenomena in nature such as lightning, thunder and floods, felt they must appease these forces, and began to worship them through the intermediary of tangible objects such as trees, rivers, mountains, rocks and animals. It must be noted, however, that in Ghanaian society the belief in a supreme being is considered to be inborn in each individual from the start of his existence. This fact is expressed in the time-honoured saying in Akan, *Obi nkyere abofra Nyame*, meaning 'The child does not need to be taught about the existence of God.'

In addition to the cult of the supreme being, each of the early kingdoms in Ghana recognised and developed the cult of a national deity, and towns and individual families maintained local gods. The people held in highest esteem priests of the various gods who served as intermediaries between them and the deities. These religious leaders not only led the people in worship, but also interpreted the oracles at the shrines of the different deities. In unsophisticated societies, both in Ghana and elsewhere, the worship of the supreme God and

of the inferior deities has had a great social and moral impact on men's lives. The people observed the dictates of moral values and well-defined codes of conduct. The strict observance of these values and codes was sustained by the belief that a breach would have grave evil consequences for both the offenders and society.

Connected with the religious cult was the observance in each kingdom or state of an annual festival which generally marked the beginning of the harvest or new fishing season, and of the new year of the indigenous calendar. On this occasion, libation was poured and the first fruits and sacrifices of domestic animals were offered to God and the inferior deities, in acknowledgement of their blessings in the past and to implore their help and protection in the ensuing year. The national festival, which was observed with pomp and pageantry, was also an occasion when most Ghanaians living away from home went back to their home towns for a family reunion. The departed members of the family were mourned, any existing disputes in the family were settled, and the family joined in a communal meal prepared from the new harvest, after they had offered portions of the meal to the departed dear ones, and their family deities. In recent times, the annual festival has offered the people an occasion to plan and take in hand communal services for the improvement of the place.

### POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

Before the country came under British rule as one colonial administrative unit, Ghana as we know it today comprised many states and kingdoms which were entirely independent of one another. Some of these were merely city states, but others like Bono, Denkyira, Akwamu and Asante were large and powerful kingdoms with a number of vassal and satellite states.

At the head of each kingdom was the supreme ruler who owed his position through hereditary succession, either, as with the Akan, through the maternal lineage, or, among the other ethnic groups, through the paternal lineage. Once installed as king, the ruler assumed the executive, legislative and judiciary powers of the kingdom. Accepted as the embodiment of all that made the nation, he was recognised as the father of the nation, and even though he might be young in age, he assumed the titles *Nana*, *Nii*, etc. which meant the 'grandfather'. He was also the link between the living and the dead, and the embodiment of the kingdom's cultural heritage. Symbolising the king's power of office and authority were the stool (or the skin, in the case of rulers in northern Ghana) and the sword, with which he swore loyalty to his people on the occasion of his installation as ruler. The stool was considered so sacred (indeed it was believed to contain the spirit of the nation) that the king never sat on it, the belief being that if the ruler ever touched it he would become impotent.

Even though the king appeared to be all powerful, there were several checks which warned him against becoming a dictator. Every ruler had a council of state, comprising heads of the leading lineage in the community, and all important actions of the ruler became lawful and effective only with the approval of the council. In most states there were two other important personalities. The first was the queen mother, who was the head of the royal family and indeed, of the entire nation. Among her other powers, she had the prerogative of presenting a candidate to the kingmakers and the people for acceptance as a new ruler. She was regularly consulted by both the king and the council of elders on most important matters of state. The second important court official was the 'linguist', who held non-hereditary office. He was the chief spokesman for the ruler as well as the people. As such, he was generally very well versed in the history, traditions and customary observances of the kingdom. No person could approach the ruler with an important official matter without first meeting the linguist.

As the kingdoms grew large in size, each state had a number of sub-rulers. These rulers not only became wing leaders of the army but were also responsible for local affairs within the areas of their respective jurisdiction. These leading subordinate rulers constituted the council of state for the kingdom. Each state had a court of justice presided over by the king, while sub-rulers presided over local courts. The metropolitan courts had jurisdiction over major matters, and were courts of appeal for the provincial courts. Summons relating to both civil and criminal cases were transmitted by a court official who carried a gold plated sword-like staff or horse tail as his authority or warrant. The courts were attended not only by the ruler and his counsellors, but also by any citizen who cared to be present. Indeed, the ordinary person could take an active part in the proceedings. In criminal cases, and occasionally in civil suits, where the truth could not be determined otherwise, it was customary to subject the parties to a trial by ordeal. Before passing judgement, the king together with his counsellors and other elderly persons repaired to a secluded place where they considered all the evidences and arguments of the parties. They then came back to the court room, and judgement was delivered through the linguist. White clay powder was besmeared on the right shoulder of the innocent or successful party, and black powder besmeared on the left hand of the person losing the suit. The king retained one third of the fees and fines, one third went to the stool (or skin) or the state treasury, and the remaining third was shared out among all other persons who assisted at the trial.

Originally, all lands were owned communally and held in trust by the king on behalf of the people. The citizen could use any vacant land. As time wore on, individual families and individuals acquired lands which became separate from the 'stool' or 'skin' lands. The family property was also held in trust by the head of the family on behalf of the members. The head of the family could not dispose of family lands without the consent of the members of the family;

in much the same way, the king could not dispose of the stool or skin lands without the approval of the counsellors of state.

State revenue was derived not only from court fees and fines, but also from sale of land, rents, royalties, tools, taxes and contributions in kind. One third of all state revenue went to the ruler for his upkeep. Another third went to the stool revenue; this was used to provide royal regalia and for public services. The remaining third was generally shared among the people. In addition to money taxes and levies to which the citizen was liable, there were certain services and payments in kind prescribed by custom which an individual had to contribute for the upkeep of the king and the royal household. For example, the people worked periodically on the farms of the king. Another practice which symbolised that the king was lord of both the land and all citizens, was the giving to him of the hind leg of certain game killed or caught by the citizen. Also, precious finds were given to the ruler. In return for all these dues and services, the king owed supreme duty to rule his subjects well, protect them and personally lead them in both defensive and offensive wars. Once installed as king, it was considered a serious breach of constitution for him to involve himself in partisan politics.

### OTHER ASPECTS OF THE PEOPLE'S CIVILIZATION

Writers of an imperialist bias have given the impression that Negro Africa had no indigenous cultural heritage, prior to the arrival of Europeans and other outsiders, such as the Arabs and Berbers. According to them, all that is of value in the African civilization developed from her contact with the outsiders who came to the continent. Modern research, archaeology and the writings of the early Europeans who visited the continent have proved that before the advent of the outsiders, the people enjoyed an admirable civilization which was reflected in their own social, political and other cultural organisations, including their arts and crafts, their music and drama, their pattern of education, their forms of government, and their economic and social systems. The preceding sections gave an account of the indigenous form of government and the social systems of the people of Ghana. The patterns of their economic institutions will be discussed in the next chapter.

Most of Ghana's ancient works of art and crafts in clay and wood have remained buried with the times. Nevertheless, archaeologists have unearthed enough remains to indicate a considerable degree of civilization which dates back centuries. Moreover, there are still preserved in the royal courts and homes of notable personalities as well as the museums, many specimens of great artistic value which can match works of art in other civilizations. These include terracotta and handicrafts in bronze and iron, gold weights, stools produced from hard-wood, and ivory carvings. Some of these are today treasured in many museums of the world.

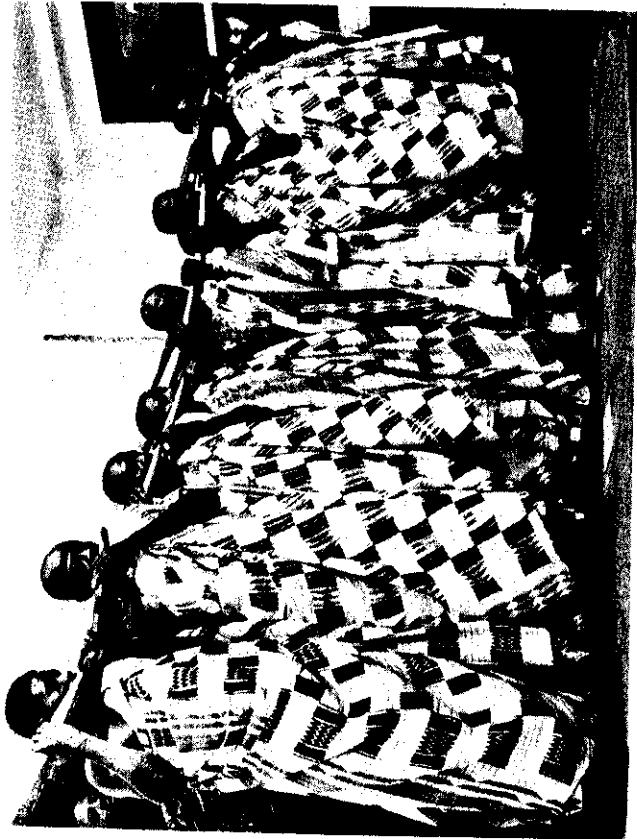


Fig 13 The Akan *Mmenson* (the seven royal horns)

Another characteristic of Ghana's civilization is their pronounced love for music, inherited from their ancestors. Their songs are interpreted not only vocally and through the medium of dancing, but also on a variety of drums, flutes and other instruments. The elephant tusk horns, such as the Akan *Mmenson* (the seven horns), probably have no parallel anywhere as musical instruments, and the music performed on them is unique in musicology.

There is also an abundant proof of the skills and technology with which the Ghanaian craftsmen worked the precious minerals into magnificent jewels of superb beauty. They mined and smelted iron ore and produced agricultural implements as well as weapons. They manufactured boats and made their own mats and wove cloth from the bark of trees. Later they wove the *kenite*, perhaps the most beautiful product of textile manufacture throughout history. At first the people produced these materials for their own immediate needs. As they advanced on the path of civilization, they exchanged their surplus products with those produced by their neighbours. Later, trade was carried on over larger areas. These well-organised patterns of trade were in operation long before the white merchants arrived.

In most African societies, including Ghana, there have always been systems by which the youth received formal training relevant to the needs of their society. They received training in social behaviour, in arts and crafts, and in the art of medicine. In arts and crafts, such as carving, smithery and boat-

making, the youth passed through a rigid apprenticeship lasting several years before they qualified and were accepted as members of the appropriate profession. Also, the science of medicine held an important place in Ghanaian society, as it did in other parts of Africa. There were, as there are today, important centres headed by celebrated priests, where aspirants received years of training, as one would today in a medical school. No person could be initiated as a priest of the local deities, with powers to attend to the sick and the dying, unless he had passed through years of training and had been initiated into the secrets of the shrines of powerful deities. Heirs-apparent also received several years of tutelage at royal courts, including those outside their own future kingdom. A notable example, as we noted on page 23 was Osei Tutu, the founder of Asante empire, who went to Denkyira royal court to receive his education in the art of government.

## Chapter 6

# Pre-Colonial Economy

own records confirm. These foodstuffs included some species of cereals like millet (or guinea corn), yam, pepper, beans and other vegetables. The Portuguese records also indicate that a species of rice was the staple crop in the country lying between the Gambia and the Cacheu Rivers. Although there are no existing records to indicate that this cereal was in cultivation in Ghana, it was not unlikely that the country grew this crop at the time of the arrival of the white men. The surplus from their farms was sold to the growing populations around the European forts, and to the Europeans both for their own consumption and for replenishing the provisions of the vessels passing off West Africa on their way to the Far East.

When the early Europeans became firmly established on the Guinea Coast, they introduced tropical crops from other lands in the New World and in the Far East. Some of the important foreign crops introduced into Ghana and other parts of the Guinea Coast were cassava, pineapple, oranges, tangerines, avocado pear, guava, sugar-cane and coconut. Crops which were indigenous in one part of the Guinea Coast were also introduced in other parts of West Africa. The European merchants introduced new crops to parts of the Guinea Coast, including Ghana, to ensure increased regular supplies of these imported crops for their own consumption and for the crews en route to the East. Later, when they were widely cultivated, the new crops introduced a diversified diet for the people.

Before mechanised farming was introduced in the country in more recent years, the people of Ghana, as happened in most other countries at the time, employed the method of shifting cultivation. The implements used were mainly the cutlass and the hoe. In the absence of labour-saving devices, farming, from planting and sowing to the harvesting, was all done by physical human labour. In consequence, the size of farms was generally small. Indeed, for a very long time farmers mostly engaged in what is called subsistence cultivation, only growing enough for their own domestic needs, with very little over for the market.

With the increasing concentration of population in the growing towns, many city dwellers cut themselves off from the land. These people depended on the surplus farm products of the countryside. To meet the demands of the market, farmers expanded their farms and increased their yields and wealth. Following the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade, more and more emphasis was placed on commercial agriculture in Ghana and other parts of West Africa. In Europe, the transformation of industrial processes called the Industrial Revolution created a great demand not only for West African palm oil, but also for other tropical crops, such as raw cotton, rubber, etc. From the second half of the nineteenth century onwards, many farmers changed to plantation farming, producing cocoa and coffee which steadily became the live-wire of the economy of Ghana.

Like many other ancient people, the people of Ghana were constantly

The indigenous economy of the peoples of Ghana was based upon four main activities: agriculture, hunting and fishing, a variety of manufactures and trade. The subject of trade was mentioned briefly in the last chapter and is taken up again in several of the later chapters of the book. The present chapter describes how agriculture, hunting and fishing and the indigenous manufacturing industries played important parts in serving the economic needs of the people both before and during the colonial period.

## AGRICULTURE

The story of all early men in a settled society begins with agriculture as the basis of their economy. Emerging from the prehistoric era, men generally ceased to depend, as they had done, on wild fruits and root-crops they had gathered and wild animals they had hunted. Instead they began to cultivate crops on farms. Ghana shared this experience. We have no exact knowledge about farming in Ghana in very early days. However, archaeology, botany and the study of languages are today providing us with some knowledge about the crops people cultivated and the methods farmers used. As we noted in Chapter 1, Ghana covers three main different geographical zones: the savannah in the northern zone, the sandy, swampy mangrove lands on the coastal belt, and, in-between these two zones, the forest belt. Some crops require much rainfall, others need ample sunshine, and others grow in zones with a combination of these climatic conditions. The type of crops grown in the above three zones has, until recently, depended very much upon the nature of the land and other geographical conditions, including the amount and duration of the annual rainfall.

The crops which were cultivated in Ghana before the advent of the Europeans were not as varied as they became later, following the introduction into the country of new crops by the white men. But it is difficult to accept the view of writers who give the impression that nearly all the major foodstuffs in Ghana today were introduced from abroad. There is no doubt that many of these were in cultivation before the arrival of the white men, as some of their

aware of the supernatural forces controlling natural phenomena. They looked to the supreme being and their local deities for good agricultural seasons and better yields. Consequently, they promoted special cults associated with the cultivation of the land. The sowing and planting period began with special religious observances and, as we noted in Chapter 4, religious festivals were also held to mark the beginning of the new harvest, which generally coincided with the beginning of the new year of their own calendar. For this reason, these festivals were celebrated with great religious and social pageantry. The first fruits were offered to the supreme God and other local and family deities, whom the people believed helped the increase of their farm products. Rulers and heads of important lineage also purified their stools, and made sacrifices of animals and foodstuffs to their deities. Libation and food such as mashed yam mixed with oil, together with boiled eggs were made by heads of families and offered to the ancestral spirits.

### HUNTING AND FISHING

Hunting and fishing, like agriculture, have been basic occupations of peoples throughout history. In prehistoric times, the catching of fish and hunting for game were limited in scope to meet the immediate needs of a man and his dependents. Men wandered through the forest and either strangled animals until they died, or killed them with weapons. Another method was the use of bush traps which they set in very ingenious ways to catch animals. Primitive fishermen had similar methods for obtaining their catch in rivers, lagoons and seas. In Ghana, as elsewhere in Africa, these methods persisted until the introduction of the gun and fishing nets by the Europeans.

Implementations used for hunting have passed through interesting stages of development in the course of history. Before the Stone Age, hunters used sticks and clubs. During the Stone Age, they invented special hardwood handles with stoneheads. In the Iron Age, hunting improved when men used more effective weapons, such as the arrow. The use of the gun and gunpowder, introduced by the white men, ushered in an entirely new era in hunting in West Africa, including Ghana. It would seem that some of the stone heads which the Akan call *Nyame Akuma* ('God's axes') were stone implements for farming and cutting, and other stone club-heads for hunting. To this day, the Akan and other groups in Ghana have special veneration for these 'axes' which, according to their traditional beliefs, were thunderbolts from heaven. They also believe that these ancient stones possess special healing properties; when placed in a cooler, the water in the vessel, so it is believed, would cure coughs.

Ghana has always been blessed with abundant facilities for fishing, having many large and small rivers, many coastal lagoons and a large inland natural lake, Bosomtwi, and the sea along the Guinea Coast being generally calm.

These fishing facilities have increased with the building of the Akosombo Dam, which has formed the world's largest artificial lake from the waters of the Volta and its tributaries.

From time immemorial, the people of Ghana have used a variety of ingenious methods for fishing. The use of wooden and iron hooks and of fishing baskets made of cane and raffia have been the commonest, but fishing nets, as we know them today, were a later European importation. Surplus fish for the market were generally dried in the sun or on an open oven. The preserved fish were sold locally or taken to distant markets. The fishing industry promoted another important industry, boat and canoe-making, which offered useful employment to country-folk in the forest lands.

Just as in early time farmers developed special religious cults associated with the harvest, so fishermen in Ghana, as elsewhere, developed cults connected with the sea and rivers and with fishing. For example, to this day, many coastal peoples observe one day in the week, Tuesday, as a day of rest from fishing. Similar customs exist where river fishing is done in rural communities. In the past, to enforce observance of these religious customs, not only were penalties imposed on defaulters, but people were also made to dread the possible evil consequences which could follow non-observance. It was believed that the river and sea gods would bring to the individual and the community frightful disasters, including gales and drowning.

### MANUFACTURE

In the early days, manufacturing throughout the world was a purely domestic occupation carried on in small family workshops. Indeed, before the application of machinery made possible what is now called the factory system, manufacturing production was undertaken mainly to meet the needs of the individual families, with only a little surplus for the market.

#### The Manufacturing Profession

The processes of indigenous manufacture in Ghana have not changed very much since early days. As we mentioned above, work was generally carried out in or near the home. The master craftsman worked with only one or a couple of tools on a small quantity of raw materials. In nearly all cases, no machinery was used; the craftsman used his hands and simple tools. The finished article was purely a hand-made product. This explains the origin of the word 'manufacture' which derives from the Latin word *manus*, meaning 'the hand' and *facere*, meaning 'to make'. Consequently, mass-production was not possible.

Master-craftsmen of the same profession in a locality generally formed themselves into a guild, whose members observed certain professional methods

of work, and followed customary procedures, breaches of which resulted in a close-door trial, followed by fines or reprimand. Misunderstandings among members were also referred to the guild for settlement or arbitration. Craftsmen attached some religious practices to their profession. The workshop and tools had to be consecrated by the pouring of libation and the offering of the blood of an animal such as a goat, sheep or chicken and the yoke of eggs before work started. There were certain occasions when members of the guild underwent other special religious observances. An example was the funeral of a guild member; members of the profession in the district attended as a group, and performed certain rituals before the deceased was buried.

The master-craftsman generally had a few apprentices working under him. Certain prescribed rituals were performed before the beginner started his apprenticeship. At the apprenticeship ceremony, which was attended by many master-craftsmen, the father or guardian of the would-be apprentice paid a fee as an advance. This included not only money but also drinks, part of which were poured in libation to invoke the blessings of God and the deities associated with the particular craft. Part of the drinks were poured on the tools used in the craft-work; it was believed that this would ward off the apprentice from hurting himself with the tools he would handle. Also part of the prescribed fee paid on this occasion was shared among leading members of the guild who witnessed the apprenticeship ceremony.

On completion of his training, the apprentice had to pass through a similar ritual before he was admitted into the association of the master-craftsmen of his particular craft. At a special ceremony, again attended by leading members of the guild, the remaining training fee, including drinks and domestic animals such as goats, sheep or chickens and drinks, was paid. This was followed by the pouring of libation and other ritual observances similar to the pre-apprentice ceremony. After the initiation ceremony, the young craftsman became a full member of the guild. However, it was customary for the new member, if he so chose, to work for his former master for some time. This practice offered him the opportunity to gain further practical experience under the supervision of his former master, and also to earn money to purchase his own tools. Furthermore, in opting to continue work under his master, the new craftsman showed his appreciation for the training he had received through the master's tutelage. There were occasions, too, when the young craftsman worked for an agreed period of time in lieu of fees he would have paid at the passing-out ceremony.

#### Common Indigenous Manufactures

Ghana has always been rich in different types of manufacture. Her craftsmen have produced a great variety of craftswork in metal, wood, clay, leather and ivory. They have also excelled in other manufactures, such as weaving and cloth-making, salt-making and soap-making. Some scholars hold the view that

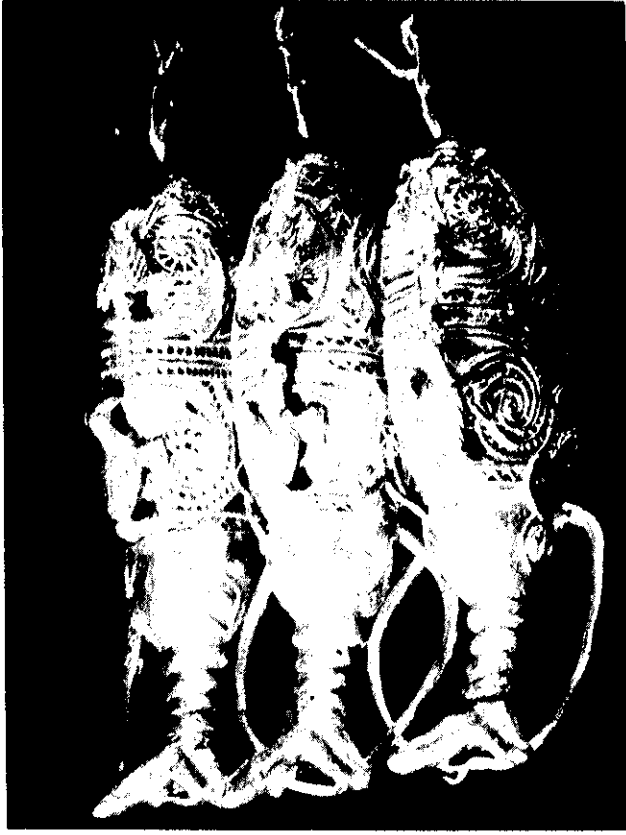


Fig 14 Gold jewellery made using the *cire perdue* method

knowledge of the use of iron came to West Africa from either northern or eastern Africa. It is likely, however, that not unlike many other ancient inventions, the people of West Africa including Ghana developed the iron industry independently. This was certainly the case of Nok in northern Nigeria, for example, where it has been established that iron craft existed several centuries before the birth of Christ. There were also sites in Ghana with rich deposits of surface iron ore which the people mined and smelted for the manufacture of a variety of articles: axes, hoes, gongs, knives, arrows, fishing hooks, chisels, etc.

Bronze manufacture was also important. Craftsmen produced articles like statuettes, masks, vases and bangles. The bronze casting of these objects was done by what is today called the *cire perdue* method (a French expression meaning 'lost wax'). A clay model of the object to be made in bronze was first moulded and molten metal was poured around the model. After a time, the metal cooled and became solidified, and the clay was then broken off leaving the metal in the desired shape. Also bronze plates were made to decorate royal stools and state swords.

The most precious of the metal crafts for which Ghana has always been unique were objects made of gold. The Akan in particular have always been renowned for their skill in making ornaments in gold.



Equally important was bead manufacture. Precious beads have always been valued not only by women, but also by kings who wore them as part of the royal ornamentation. Beads were manufactured either from granite stones or from special clay. After moulding the clay into the required shape through the process of *cire perdue*, the beads went through a process of heating by fire. When cooled down, the object was then polished. However, the bead-making industry appears to have declined when the Berbers and the Europeans introduced other kinds of beads into the country, especially the so-called Aggrey Beads, called *Bota* in Akan.

Another indigenous manufacture which required special skill was pottery. To this day, the unsophisticated Ghanaian prizes the locally produced earthenware pot, plates, and coolers. Pottery was generally the occupation of women, and the products were made entirely by hand. The finished products bore an endless variety of designs and punch-marks. Special whitish or red clay was treated and moulded into the required shape and size, and after drying it in the sun, the object was then fired under a pile of firewood.

Allied with pottery was another craft using clay, namely terra-cotta. Some of the objects depicted proverbial sayings and outstanding events in the history of the land. Many of the objects were preserved in the royal museums; others were used at shrines as the visible symbols of the deity venerated at the shrine. Others, again, were used purely for decorative purposes. Early Ghanaian crafts-

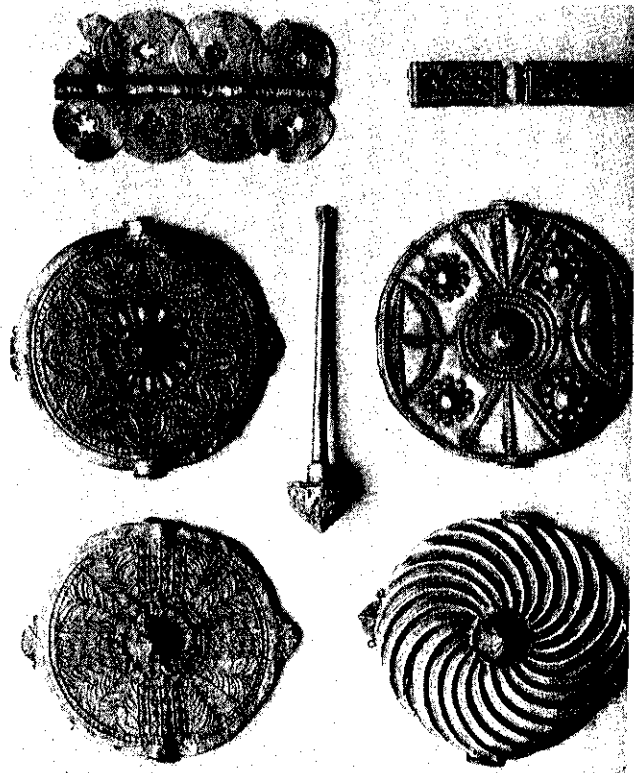


Fig 15 Examples of brass craftsmanship

men also specialised in the manufacture of clay pipes. From the study of the earliest native clay pipes, it would seem that pipe-smoking existed in the country before the white men introduced their own pipes to the Guinea Coast. The early smokers probably used leaves different from the tobacco which the white men introduced in West Africa.

Salt manufacture was another native industry which anti-dated the advent of the white men to West Africa. Trenches were made near the sea creating salty lagoons to catch water. This was left to dry up, and the resulting salt cakes were treated for use. Another method used was to boil the salt water until the water evaporated, leaving a cake of salt ready for use. The greatest centres in Ghana of the salt industry were Elmina and Keta. From these places, the salt producers engaged in lucrative trade in salt with the neighbouring rural peoples, who in turn became middlemen, carrying the trade far inland. Later salt became an important trade item between the coast and the hinterland.

Another indigenous manufacture which helped the economy of early Ghana was soap-making. This art, like most of the others described above, including salt manufacture, has survived to this day. The peelings of crops, like the plantain, were burnt into ashes which were then boiled in palm oil and other ingredients until the mixture thickened and settled. The chemical ingredients of the native soap were so rich that the finished product was far superior to the modern factory-produced soaps as a detergent, and also for keeping the user's skin very smooth. In the seventeenth century, the preference for native soaps had become so great that the Portuguese banned the importation of this commodity to other West African places under their sphere of influence.

Two other important manufactures in the country were leatherwork and cloth-making. In the savannah areas to the north of Ghana, where cattle, sheep and goats thrived and hides of these animals were plentiful, leatherwork became an important occupation of the people. The finished work was characterised by a great variety of designs and was very much in demand in distant places. In West Africa, as happened elsewhere, the first forms of cloth and clothes were produced either from the skins of large animals or from the barks of certain soft trees. The early Ghanaian manufacturers showed great skill in processing cloth from the bark of the tree known in Akan as *Kyenkyen*. Later, the people began to make cloth from cotton. This new manufacture encouraged the arts of spinning, weaving and dyeing. The finished work was often dyed in different colours, depending upon the occasion on which the cloth would be used. The manufacture of cloth chintz also became a very lucrative industry. The rich finished cloth was, and still is, worn by chiefs and other important personalities. The greatest example is the *Kente*, woven entirely on hand-operated looms; the finished product, worn on special occasions, has probably not been surpassed in quality, beauty and artistry in the history of cloth-making anywhere.

From very early days, Ghanaian craftsmen became skilled in ivory and wood carving as well. The forest in Ghana, until recently, abounded in elephants whose tusks were greatly valued for making royal trumpets and horns. Craftsmen also used these tusks for carving ivory objects into a variety of superb figures. Because of the great value which was placed on their products, wood-carvers were always held in special esteem in Ghanaian society. They carved objects of religious significance as well as objects relating to kingship, such as the royal stools and drums. It was mainly for this reason that this craft was regarded as sacred, and the tools used by wood-carvers were consecrated and regarded as sacred objects. In addition, the wood-carvers produced other articles including domestic utensils such as pots, cups, dishes, ladles and spoons, together with dolls, both for play and for use at religious shrines. Another form of craft in wood was boat and canoe-making. The demands of fishing and the ferrying trade encouraged skilled men to specialise in this craft.

There was a time when the erroneous view was held, outside the continent, that Africa had no culture or civilization of her own, and that Africans owned all that was of value to the tutelage offered them by their civilized masters from overseas. Research has abundantly confirmed that, quite independently of outsiders, Africa's own statesmen and men of talent and genius have built up an enviable heritage. Her craftsmen, as we have seen in this chapter, have translated these institutions and values in amazing art forms, which give us glimpses of our people's great civilization.

## Chapter 7

# Relations with the Early Europeans

From the first half of the fifteenth century, Portuguese explorers began to visit the Guinea Coast, and by 1471 they had reached the coast of modern Ghana. For about two centuries they stayed on the coast mainly for trading purposes and made a permanent impact on places where they had settlements. In time, other European traders followed the steps of the Portuguese to share in rich trade with the people of the Guinea Coast.

### THE PORTUGUESE IN GHANA

Several reasons caused the first Portuguese explorers to sail round the continent of Africa. In addition to their desire to bypass the Muslim sphere of influence in what is today the Middle East and find a new sea route to the Far East, there were several other reasons. The most important reason was economic; they wanted to have a share in the rich trade with the Western Sudan without having to use the trans-Saharan trade routes, which for centuries were controlled by the north African Berbers and other Muslims. A strong Christian country, Portugal also aspired to reduce the Muslim influence which was spreading fast in the Western Sudan. If successful in this enterprise, the Portuguese would not only be in a position to gain a hold on the Western Sudanese trade but could also convert the people to Christianity. Thirdly, the exploration was prompted by the spirit of enquiry and enthusiasm for knowledge which was sweeping Europe at this time of renaissance.

As we noted above, the Portuguese adventurers arrived on the coast of modern Ghana in January 1471. For eleven years they engaged in trade with the people of Edina, which they named *El Mina* (the gold mines) because of the abundant gold they found there and in surrounding areas. Becoming convinced that prospects for trade were very good, they obtained land from the king of Elmina, built a magnificent castle in 1482 near the mouth of the River Benya, and named it Sao Jaogo (or St George). To this day, the castle (with later modifications by the Dutch) has remained the greatest memorial of Portuguese activities on the West Coast of Africa. The Portuguese chronicler